



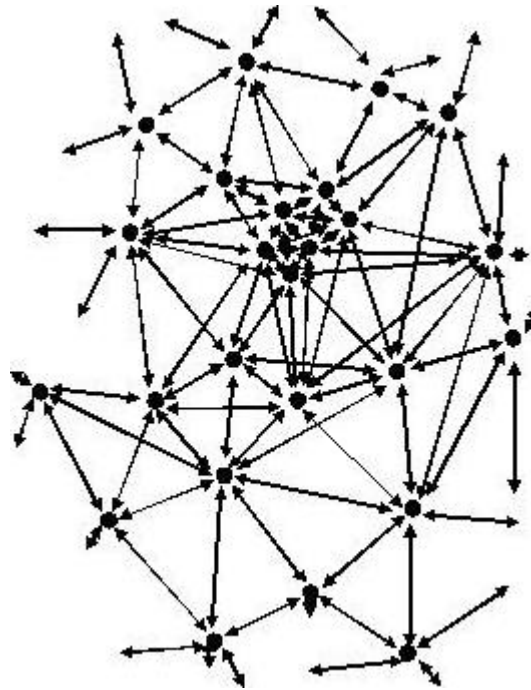
[Tower of Babel](#)

# Languages, Introduction

Each language is a work of art, as priceless as any other that can be imagined. All languages are part of the general human heritage.

Languages are kept alive by the speakers of the language, and the writers. This is a communistic collaborative project.

Each language is produced, and reproduced, in a form of organization that is not central, but has an unlimited number of nodes and multiple connections between nodes. (See [Ron Press, New tools for Marxists, 1994](#)).



Creation of language is a real-life, on-going example of the kind of mode of production that can supersede the capitalist mode of production. The work is its own reward. The artifact produced is beyond price, and it belongs to all. It at once becomes a common patrimony.

The problem with learning languages is to learn the second one, and then the third. After that, it becomes clear that the more you learn, the clearer becomes the question of language, as such. Learning languages teaches the learner how to understand people, in more ways than just understanding what they are saying when they talk to you. Far from a “confusion of tongues”, as in the Babel-myth, the many languages are all open gateways. None of them are walls.

This course will not teach any particular language, but the CU encourages you to learn more languages, including foreign languages, especially the ones that are spoken by large numbers Africans on the continent, such as Kiswahili, French, and Arabic.

In the modern world of science and mass communication, the codification of language into dictionaries, and the construction of an actual literature in the language, enhances the language produced by the people, to the extent that languages with these assets become competitive and even dominant over languages that do not have a living, growing literature.

In South Africa, there are eleven official languages, but most of them are not well served with dictionaries or with the publication of written literature. This means that the upward mobility of people, caused by our democratic breakthrough and its

aftermath, have resulted in a flight to English in particular, as the most developed language in the country, and in the world. This is a trend, but it remains the case that all of the official languages are spoken, and are all the first or home language of significant numbers of South Africans.

Children need to be taught in the language that they know from home, in the first years of their schooling. This is an on-going problem in South Africa.

### **This CU Course on Languages**

This ten-part course will attempt something that does not exist, as far as we know, in South Africa, which is a critique of language use, and language policy, in the country today.

This is a political education course, and it is one of the sixteen CU ten-part courses.

In this first attempt to do the course, we will need to ask our students and our well-wishers to help with it.

In the first place we need ideas for topics, and if it can be found, we need short texts (articles, speeches, lectures, book-chapters) on the politics of language.

The course will interrogate, and critique, the 11-official-language policy. We will ask if in practice this policy is working as a cover and a blanket under which the nine official African languages are being allowed to fall into greater disrepair. In this regard, we will look at [PANSALB](#), [Kha Ri Gude](#) and any other institutions and programmes of this kind that may come to our attention.

We will then propose ways in which language – an institution without a state – can be strengthened with the communist means that we have at our own disposal: Education, Organisation and Mobilisation. Language, as we have seen, is generated communistically. It should be possible to regenerate the same languages communistically.

Hence we will look at the possibility of creating dictionaries by “crowd-sourcing”, using wikis.

And we will look at the possible application of Freirean pedagogical methods for the co-operative learning of languages in study circles, because languages are social, and we think they should be taught socially, as a community of practice, and not as commodified, “qualified” products.



National Flag

# South African Languages

The attached text is reproduced from the very full and clear Wikipedia article on “Languages of South Africa.”

This Wikipedia text gives us a very good empirical spread of data relevant to the general status of languages in South Africa, to start our course with, plus a large number of useful hyperlinks to satisfy the curious.

## Constitution

In addition to the factual basis, the Wikipedia page quotes the parts of the South African Constitution that are relevant to the question of languages. It is in the Constitution that the “official” languages are named as such.

The Constitution declares an explicit intention to restore the indigenous languages of our people and to repair the damage done to them under apartheid.

We will accept this as a good and necessary aim of the Constitution, and we will continue to ask the question during the course: Has the SA Constitution been obeyed in this regard?

## The National Flag

Not everyone knows that the black green and gold flag, now frequently referred to as “the ANC flag”, was in the exile days known as the National Flag. This is to remind us that the struggle was to come back to ourselves, to recover what is ours, and to be ourselves. The struggle for languages is that kind of struggle – a struggle for South African characteristics.

In the case of the National Flag, it was set aside during the negotiations that led to the democratic breakthrough of 1994. It was replaced by something put together by

a graphic designer, working for the old regime since 1977, by the name of [Frederick Gordon Brownell](#): a respectable man.

Languages, too, can be lost in a respectable way.

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### **From the South African Constitution:**

1. The official languages of the Republic are [Sepedi](#), [Sesotho](#), [Setswana](#), [siSwati](#), [Tshivenda](#), [Xitsonga](#), [Afrikaans](#), [English](#), [isiNdebele](#), [isiXhosa](#) and [isiZulu](#).
2. Recognising the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages.
3. (a) The national government and provincial governments may use any particular official languages for the purposes of government, taking into account usage, practicality, expense, regional circumstances and the balance of the needs and preferences of the population as a whole or in the province concerned; but the national government and each provincial government must use at least two official languages.  
(b) Municipalities must take into account the language usage and preferences of their residents.
4. The national government and provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must regulate and monitor their use of official languages. Without detracting from the provisions of subsection (2), all official languages must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably.
5. A [Pan South African Language Board](#) established by national legislation must
  - (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of -
    - (i) all official languages;
    - (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
    - (iii) sign language; and
  - (b) promote and ensure respect for -
    - (i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including [German](#), [Greek](#), [Gujarati](#), [Hindi](#), [Portuguese](#), [Tamil](#), [Telegu](#) and [Urdu](#); and
    - (ii) [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), [Sanskrit](#) and other [languages used for religious purposes](#) in South Africa.

— Constitution of the Republic of South Africa<sup>[10]</sup>

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- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Languages of South Africa, Wikipedia, 2013](#)
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# PanSALB

PanSALB was established under the SA Constitution, which says the following:

A [Pan South African Language Board](#) established by national legislation must

(a) promote, and create conditions for, **the development and use of -**

(i) **all official languages;**

(ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and

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(i) all languages commonly used by communities in South Africa, including [German](#), [Greek](#), [Gujarati](#), [Hindi](#), [Portuguese](#), [Tamil](#), [Telegu](#) and [Urdu](#); and

(ii) [Arabic](#), [Hebrew](#), [Sanskrit](#) and other [languages used for religious purposes](#) in South Africa.

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The **2013-2014 Annual Performance Plan** downloadable from the PanSALB web site says:

## 2.4 Programme 4: Languages Services, Programme Description

*This programme is made up of **NLBs [National Language Bodies]**, **NLUs [National Lexicography Units]**, **Language Use services** (language in education, translation, interpreting, and literature included), **Research**, and **Provincial Coordination services**.*

**NLBs** are responsible for the implementation of the languages framework for each of the official languages including the Khoi and San languages and sign languages. This would involve authentication and screening of processes. **NLU**s are responsible for the production of lexicographic language products and service. **For example the production of dictionaries – monolingual to multilingual dictionaries.**

**Language use** is responsible for the application of language in the different spheres of life e.g. language in education, literature, and specialist areas – banking etc. **Research** is responsible for exploration of information on languages. **Provincial coordination** is responsible for providing secretariat support to Provincial Language Committees (PLCs) and coordinating language services in the province.

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The **2011-2012 Annual Report** downloadable from the PanSALB web site has a statement by **Mr. Mxolisi Zwane**, the Caretaker CEO of PanSALB, which includes the following:

*PanSALB has been in the spotlight for the past two or three years for the wrong reasons. As a result concerns were raised by the Portfolio Committee of Arts & Culture in Parliament, the Ministry of Arts and Culture and various other concerned stakeholders. Areas of concern were around the governance of this institution as well as its **failure to fulfil its core mandate**... In response to this complaint the Minister of Arts and Culture, the honourable Mr Paul Mashatile, commissioned an investigation which was conducted by The Resolve Group, a report of which was delivered to him on 30 March 2012. The findings of this commission confirmed the concerns that were raised earlier:*

- It was clear that PanSALB as an organisation, was not fulfilling its legislative mandate and that while it continues to exist as an organisation and pays the salaries of its employees and infrastructure costs, it is not fulfilling the functions for which it was formed, structured and staffed.*
- There were challenges regarding governance issues in that the entity was not fully compliant with the Public Finance Management Act, Treasury Regulations and other legislative requirements.*



- *The board of PanSALB had failed to meet its obligations, both in terms of oversight, fulfilling its fiduciary duties and ensuring the fulfilment of its functions in terms of the act.*

*That being the case the minister dissolved the PanSALB Board and appointed myself as Caretaker Chief Executive Officer, the Accounting Officer and with the Accounting Authority mandate. The responsibility of my position was also to bring about a turnaround strategy that will enable the organisation to fulfil its mandate while addressing all governance issues.*

*I resumed my duties on 15 June 2012, and met with all staff members at head office to begin the process of intervention and mapping out the way forward. On 20 June 2012 I appointed a team of professionals to assist in the organisation review and stabilization process. Together with the team our focus was to stabilize the organisation, to stop mismanagement and maladministration, to revive staff morale and to refocus the organisation in fulfilling its core mandate.*

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There is a [PanSALB History](#) page on the PanSALB web site, which contains very little actual history, but which describes in detail, what PanSALB is supposed to do and how it is structured.

The PanSALB History page includes the following:

### ***Lexicography and Terminology Development***

*Another of PanSALB's focus areas is that of lexicography and terminology development. Nine **National Lexicography Units** were registered in 2001, their task being to compile monolingual explanatory dictionaries and other products to help with language development. The Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, and isiXhosa units have published a number of volumes of their monolingual dictionaries. The Tshivenda Lexicography Unit, based at the University of Venda, launched the world's first Tshivenda dictionary in July 2004, and said it expected to publish the final draft in 2006 or 2007. The lexicography units are based at tertiary institutions throughout South Africa. Each unit is managed by a board of directors and registered as a Section 21 (not-for-profit) company, which allows the unit autonomy to raise funds to carry on its work.*

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## CU Comment

When the CU committed, in August 2012, to deliver a Languages course, problematising the question of languages in South Africa, we knew that there was a problem with PanSALB, because after eighteen years since its establishment in 1995, there was nothing visible to show for its work.

The particular products we were looking for, which we take to be the sign of a developing language, or of a language which has a chance, at least, to survive, is what are described in the passage above as **monolingual explanatory dictionaries**. A language which does not have such a dictionary is at best marking time, and at worst is on a slide towards oblivion. We will return to this question with practical suggestions and historical examples, later in the course.

From the PanSALB web site a year later, in August 2013, it is apparent that the picture is still very little changed.

There is a candid statement by Mr Mxolisi Zwane, the Caretaker CEO, which describes the realisation by the government that PanSALB was not fulfilling its mandate, and his consequent appointment. Part of this statement is reproduced above.

The subsequent 2013-2014 Annual Performance Plan is detailed, and 86 pages long. We are going to concentrate on the tell-tale question of dictionaries. We find that they are supposed to be produced under PanSALB by semi-autonomous units, constituted as Section 29 not-for-profit companies, located in tertiary [educational] institutions. But there are still no “monolingual explanatory dictionaries” published for any of the indigenous African languages.

To conclude this introduction on PanSALB, below is a table showing what is given from the drop-down menu on the Home page for “Languages”, on 30 August 2013. This is where PanSALB is purporting to explain itself to the official language groups. Four of them, plus Sign, have nothing in them except the words “Under Construction”.

It means that PanSALB is not concerned to check that its own web site is conforming with the rules on language that PanSALB, among other things, is supposed to police in terms of the Act and the Constitution. This is really a scandal.

NLU	Link
Zulu	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/isizulu.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/isizulu.html</a>
Xhosa	"Under Construction"
Afrikaans	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/afrikaans.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/afrikaans.html</a>
English	"Under Construction"
Northern Sotho	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/sesothosalebowa.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/sesothosalebowa.html</a>
Tswana	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/setswana.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/setswana.html</a>
Sotho	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/sesotho.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/sesotho.html</a>
Tsonga	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/xitsonga.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/xitsonga.html</a>
Swati	"Under Construction"
Venda	"Under Construction"
Ndebele	<a href="http://www.pansalb.org.za/isindebele.html">http://www.pansalb.org.za/isindebele.html</a>
Sign language	"Under Construction"

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## Languages, Part 2a



# Kha Ri Gude

## **What is the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign?**

The Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign was launched in February 2008, with the intention of enabling 4,7 million adults above the age of 15 years to become literate and numerate in one of the eleven official languages. Achieving this goal will enable South Africa to reach its UN: Education For All commitment made at Dakar in 2000 - that of halving the country's illiteracy rates by 2015. Initiated and managed by the Department of Education, Kha Ri Gude delivers across all nine provinces in a massive logistical outreach. The Campaign enables adult learners to read, write and calculate in their mother tongue in line with the Unit Standards for ABET level 1, and also to learn spoken English. The specifically designed Campaign materials teach reading, writing and numeracy and integrates themes and lifeskills such as health, gender, the environment and civic education. These materials have been adapted for use in Braille in eleven languages, and for use by the deaf.

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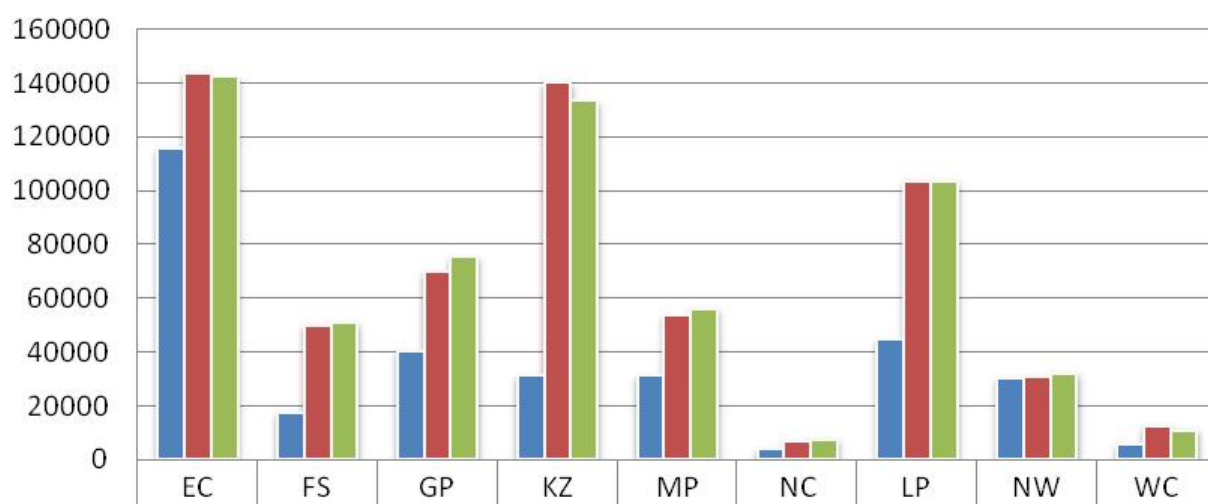
## **What is the role of the volunteers?**

The volunteers are central to the Campaign and contribute not only to the teaching and learning process but also to ensuring advocacy, recruitment, monitoring, and ensuring that the Campaign is a vibrant part of communities. Methods of communication differ from the usual methods and include: Word of mouth through meetings with women's groups, the youth, taxi organisations, trades unions, traditional leadership, traditional healers, door-to-door visits. Announcements in church, at funerals, at Imbizos, taxi ranks, society meetings. Interviews and announcements on local and community radio, community newspapers. The display of posters, distribution of pamphlets, adverts on notice boards and even loud hailing.

During the 2008/09 and 2009/20 financial years, the Campaign enabled close on one million learners to become literate and has created approximately 75 000 short term facilitation jobs. By drawing on the participation of a range of stakeholders, the Campaign is evidence that "together we can make a difference".

The following chart illustrates the growth of the Campaign by province over the 2008/09 and 2009/10 financial years.

## Increased learner enrolment 2008 - 2009



■ 2008	116009	17644	40526	31534	31534	3990	44853	30561	5762
■ 2009 target	144060	50220	70040	140420	54000	6840	103860	30960	12600
■ 2009 actual	142671	50984	75678	133486	55971	7654	103828	32193	11173

### CU Comment

This course is concerned with languages, and not primarily with literacy.

It is not possible to see for sure that this programme is going to strengthen the use of other languages when it is at the same time promoting the use of English.

Literacy is important for languages. Especially it is important that literature of all kinds is produced in any language that expects to survive, and that the literature is read.

We report this programme in its own terms. We await further reports, appraisals and criticism.

- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).

### Course: Languages

#### 26001, Introductions to Parts 0, 1 and 2

2946 words